

Dr M: Slow down on projects lest

# Preserving

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and Alex Choong

LANGKAWI, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, confident that the promotion of Langkawi as a major tourist destination will draw more visitors to the island, wants development projects to take into account environmental considerations.

He said Langkawi has tremendous potential for growth but added that proper landscaping and preservation of trees and the mangrove swamp were equally important.

In fact, he would not mind if development in Langkawi "slows down a little bit" so that preservation of the environment surrounding the cluster of islands could be properly done.

He said this when he visited Rebak Island Marina Resort this morning, about 10 minutes by boat from Pantai Cenang.

"I think we will have to slow down a bit. We have to preserve some of the islands."

Dr Mahathir said Langkawi should still be able to attract foreign tourists if development took on a slower pace.

"With the promotion and recent marketing being done in European countries, there should be enough tourists coming to Langkawi. The potential is always there. It depends on how they market it."

He added that there were numerous events being planned in Langkawi to attract foreign tourists next year. These include the Le Tour de Langkawi from March 1 to 10 and the Langkawi International Airport Technology and Ground Support Exhibition from April 16 to 19.

This will be followed by Lima '97 exhibition where the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre (MIEC) would be expanded.

Dr Mahathir was briefed on the development progress of the resort by Hicom Holdings president Datuk Seri Yahaya Ahmad, Hicom Leisure Berhad managing director John Roozmond

and Sullivan Commercial Pty Ltd director Victor Sankey.

Dr Mahathir, who spent about one-and-a-half hours on the island, was also shown around the resort and later inspected the marina which can accommodate 128 yachts and boats. The deep-wharf marina bay was developed from a natural mangrove swamp.

The RM100 million resort, which is easily accessible by ferry from Langkasuka, will have its soft opening next month.

Dr Mahathir said the resort operators had shown him the plans on the proposed development of Pulau Rebak and "I generally agree with their plans."

The Prime Minister, who was extremely conscious of the environmental aspects of development in Langkawi, said he had told the resort operators to use more natural and local materials when building the resort.

"I told them not to cut down the trees. They can still build within the trees and it doesn't matter which direction the houses face," he said.

Asked on what some quarters referred to as a glut of hotel rooms in Langkawi, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know about a glut, but I know of shortage of rooms at this Lima."

All the 7,000 rooms in Langkawi were reported to have been taken by tourists, visitors and exhibitors taking part in Lima '95. Chalets operated by the locals had also been taken up.

Some Lima exhibitors were also forced to put up at hotels in Penang and had to travel by air to Langkawi daily for the duration of the exhibition.

Lima '95, which began on Dec 5, ends tomorrow.

Roozmond said the resort, which currently has 38 chalets comprising 76 rooms, would be expanded to 120 rooms by next year.

"Our mission is to transform Rebak into a fully integrated leisure, meeting and business realisation resort while retaining its many natural splendours," he said.

environment is destroyed

# Langkawi